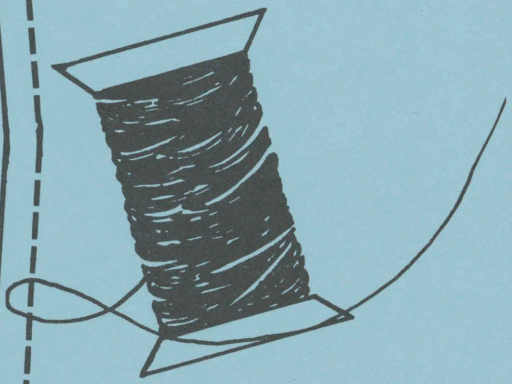
1981

# Sewing Lightweight Knits

Cooperative Extension South Dakota State University

FS 791

# sewing lightweight knits



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# sewing lightweight knits

Soft, fluid lightweight knit fabrics are popular for very good reasons. They have outstanding wrinkle resistance and are comfortable to wear. They retain their "new look" through many washings, and they are ideal for travel.

They snag easily. You will become alert to rough surfaces, and you probably will develop your own favorite way to fix snags.

Some lightweight knits, such as jersey or tricot, stretch in one or both directions. Jersey knits will run in the lengthwise direction.

## Pattern selection

Select patterns with few seams and a minimum of topstitching. Patterns should enhance the beauty and the soft draping that the fabric can do.

Seams stitched with the straight grain of the fabric have more of a tendency to pucker than those slightly on the bias.

Avoid patterns with circular or bias cut skirts, as the fabric will stretch, creating an uneven hemline.

## Fabric preparation and care

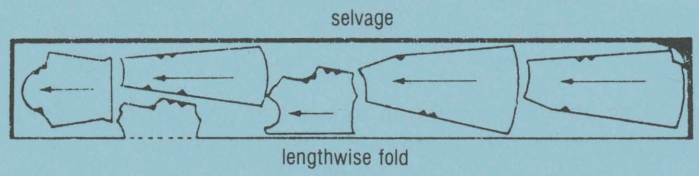
Preshrink lightweight knit fabrics. This removes excess finish and relaxes yarns that may have stretched on the bolt.

Fabrics with a high percentage of cotton could shrink considerably; they may need several preshrinkings. Also preshrink notions, interfacings, and trim.

Most of these fabrics can be washed or dry cleaned. Read care instructions on the fabric bolt to find the recommended method. If machine washing, use a gentle cycle if possible and add a fabric softener to the last rinse. Tumble dry at low to medium temperatures and remove promptly when the dryer stops.

## Layout and cutting

Use a "with nap" layout to avoid directional shading. If the fabric is slippery and hard to handle, cover the table with tissue paper or a bed sheet and pin the fabric to it. Do not let a knit hang over the edge of a cutting surface.




Use ballpoint pins, placing them within the seam allowances of the pattern to avoid pin holes. With a sharp shears, cut with long, even strokes.

## Interfacing

Carefully consider the interfacing you will use. It is necessary in most garments to help retain the original line of the design but interfacing should not change the drape or feel of the fabric.

Lightweight fusible interfacings of the nonwoven or tricot knit types work well with these fabrics. Be sure to test such interfacings on a fabric scrap before deciding to use them on the garment.

## Machine stitching

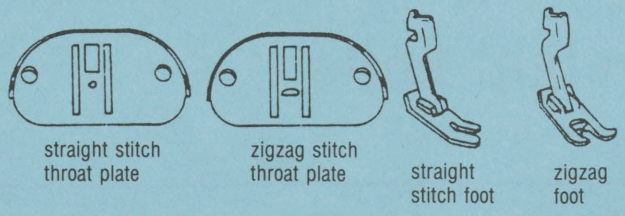
Use a fine ballpoint sewing machine needle, size 9 or 11 (65 or 70), and 8 to 10 stitches per inch. Some companies have a special needle designed to help prevent skipped stitches on lightweight knit fabrics.

You may want to try holding the fabric taut before and after the needle, still allowing the fabric to feed through normally. A very slight zigzag stitch may work better than a straight stitch for seams, as it adds some flexibility to the stitch.

The straight stretch stitch which some machines have is too heavy for a lightweight knit and should not be used.

The straight stitch throat plate with the small round hole is better than the zigzag or general purpose throat plate with the large oval opening. The all purpose plate may cause seam puckering and skipped stitches by allowing the fabric to be drawn down into the hole with each stitch.

If a straight stitch plate is not available for your machine, place a piece of tape over the throat plate so only a small hole is there for the needle to go through. Or you can put tissue paper between the fabric and the plate and stitch through the paper.

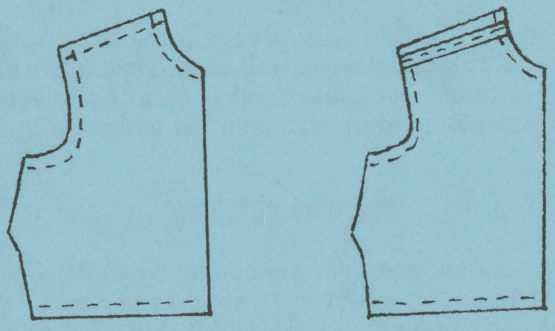



Use only the minimum amount of pressure on the presser foot that will still feed the fabric.

Use a balanced, moderate tension, as puckered seams may be the result of excessive thread tension. The same type of thread should always be used in needle and bobbin.

## Construction techniques

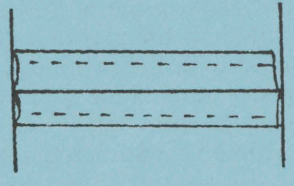
Stay stitching is important at the neck, armhole, shoulder, and waistline to avoid stretching. Shoulder and waist seams may need to be stayed with woven seam binding.



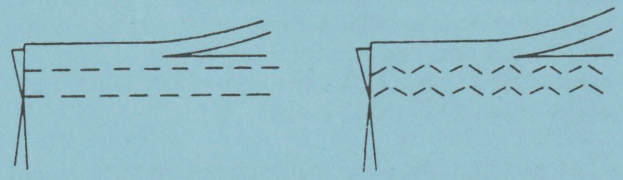
Pins, chalk, or tailor's tacks are a better choice for marking than tracing wheel and carbon. A new marking tool called a "Tack It" also works well, as it will not leave an impression or snag the fabric.

### Seam finishes

Seam finishing is not required on most lightweight knits. If seam edges have a tendency to curl, edgestitch close to the raw edge.



A narrow, double stitched seam may be used for added durability on some garments, or in particular areas such as armholes. Stitch a plain seam, then stitch again 1/8 to 1/4 inch away, using a straight stitch or zigzag. Trim close to the second stitching. Press this seam toward the back of the garment.

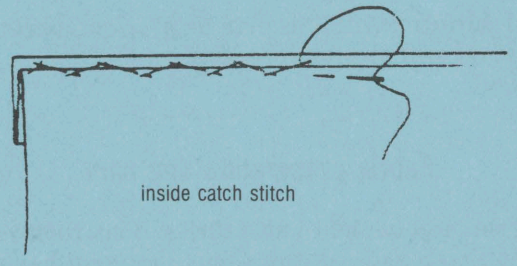


### Hems

Allow garments to hang at heast 24 hours before hemming. Finish the hem edge by stitching ¼ inch from the cut edge.

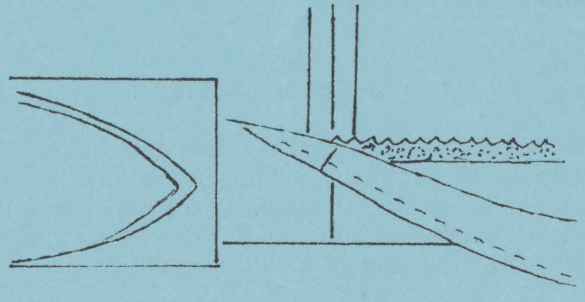
The type of hem finish depends on the fabric. Keep hems narrow, not more than 1 to 1½ inches.

When stitching hems by hand, catch the smallest amount of fabric possible. Keep stitches small and do not pull them too tight as this will cause a "dimpling" effect on the right side

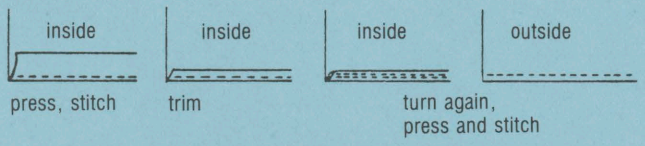



Fusing works very well on most lightweight knit hems. It saves time and usually results in the least visible hem. Simply place a narrow (3/8 to 1/2 inch) strip of fusible web under the hem close to the raw edge. Using a press cloth, fuse following the manufacturer's directions.

Generally you use a wool setting on the iron and press for 10 seconds. Always make a test hem to be sure this method is compatible with the fabric.



Another hem finish is a narrow machine hem with one or two rows of topstitching.This usually looks nice when there is topstitching somewhere else on the garment.




## Pressing

The fiber content of the knit determines the temperature setting of the iron. Test the iron on a fabric sample. Steam press lightly in the lengthwise direction to avoid stretching the fabric.

Allow fabric to dry completely before handling.

Some of the synthetic knits will heat set easily. Place strips of paper under darts and seam allowances to avoid impressions on the right side of the fabric. When pressing on the right side, use a press cloth to prevent glazing the fabric.

## Closures

Machine buttonholes are most frequently used on these knits. Choose a lightweight button so that the fabric is able to support the weight. To prevent stretching, stitch buttonholes over tissue paper, tearing away the paper when finished.

Zippers with synthetic tapes are generally softer and work best with these fabrics. The more it bends, the more flexible the zipper is and the more compatible it is with a soft fabric. A hand-picked zipper (sewn in by hand) looks nice on these fabrics.

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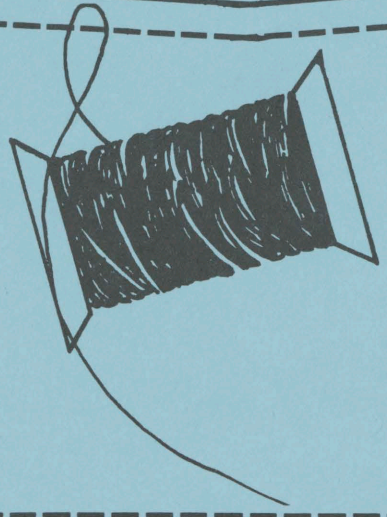

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